

Remarks for the Hon. Qubad Talabani and National Public Radio, March 16, 2008

The month of March is bittersweet for many Iraqi Kurds.

Not only does this March mark the fifth anniversary of the liberation of all Iraqis from Saddam's reign of terror but it is also the anniversary of the genocide against the Kurdish residents of Halabja. A variety of poison gasses were used to exterminate innocent men, women and children 20 years ago this very day – March 16th.

The genocide of the Kurds between 1987 and 1988 included the brutal attack on Halabja as part of a larger campaign intended to annihilate the Kurds of Iraq. During this campaign, named Anfal, the regime killed close to 200,000 Kurds. Many were straight out executed; thousands more were abducted, never to be seen again – until they were exhumed from mass graves after Iraq was liberated.

Today, as we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Halabja tragedy, our sight is on the future as we develop ways to assist survivors to rebuild their lives. The people of Halabja still suffer from the effects of the attack, including unusually high rates of cancers, birth defects and miscarriages, not to mention the irreparable damage done to the environment.

Halabja, once a vibrant center of Kurdish culture, was, in a day, turned into a symbol of Kurdish tragedy. It is our ground zero.

The United States needs to make a commitment to the people of Kurdistan to address the needs of the survivors - 20 years after the genocide.

The people of Iraqi Kurdistan have made remarkable progress since the Anfal campaign, thanks, in large part, to the protection provided under the no fly zone established after the 1991 Gulf War by the US, Britain and France and based out of Turkey. Americans should be proud of where Iraqi Kurdistan stands today – with its thriving civil society, ongoing transition to democracy, and a free market, in the heart of the Islamic world.

The success of Iraqi Kurdistan, as a region of stability, can serve as a model to the rest of Iraq as it builds its institutions of government, and its new economy.

Later this month, Kurds will be celebrating *Nawroz*, the start of our new year. The start of a new year stirs hope and fuels dreams for Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, Arabs and others living in Kurdistan. Share with us, our determination, as we usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

But when Kurds celebrate *Nawroz*, we also remember those that died in our decades-old struggle. The international community should honor the victims of Halabja, along with the hundreds of thousands from across the country who were exterminated by Saddam's brutal regime. The genocide of Iraq must be internationally recognized, and it must never, ever, be allowed to happen again.

Qubad Talabani speech, April 16, 2008, Florida International Summit
2008, University of Central Florida, Fairwinds Alumni Hall, Orlando,
Florida

Good morning ladies and gentleman.

On Sunday, I returned from four weeks in Kurdistan, the first four weeks of our new year. Always an exciting time, this visit was even more so. Things that Iraqis had once only whispered about, and then realized they could hope for, are becoming true. We are developing our democratic and economic institutions and now have the confidence to open our nation to our friends, for investment and development.

This is my first stop since returning to the United States and it is hard to think of a more appropriate place to come. This is the new home of the first ever chair in Kurdish studies, at the University of Central Florida – an honor that is thrilling to me and all Kurds. Here is the first step toward greater cooperation and knowledge between our

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two unique regions, one that will generate understand and opportunity for Florida and Iraq.

Now, add to that ANOTHER stated mission of University of Central Florida's Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Global Perspective: to help advance UCF's goal of providing international emphasis to curricula and research and to work to expand the university's efforts to enlarge Central Florida's awareness and understanding of the interconnectedness of the global community.

I am in agreement in the importance of such interconnectedness.

International knowledge and cooperation are key, as you here know so well. Recently, three of your area's leading business organizations were joined by more than 250 community leaders to discuss how the Central Florida region can remain competitive in the new global economy. The Central Florida Partnership, the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission and the Orlando/Orange

County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc., sponsored the Community Leadership Conference, themed “Going Global Together.”

How is Kurdistan connected to this region’s economics – and how could it be further connected? That is something we in Kurdistan now have the ability to examine and pursue. And we see your region, through such studies as the Metro Orlando economic development commission, as a wonderful example of how to deepen initial economic niches and broaden the field to use all of the creativity and resources.

See if this sounds familiar. In general, a region with growth potential as an industry cluster and compatibility with Florida strengths is characterized by at least the following: sufficient infrastructure, organization that includes including participation from industry leaders, economic development groups and universities, and “seed”

projects that give momentum and visibility to cluster development activities. Kurdistan has all of those.

Here in central Florida, there are based a number of strong and established industry sectors, which is a goal we have established. As in Kurdistan, there are community and industry leaders who are dedicated to advancing the growth of these sectors as the region enhances its standing as a place good for business.

You properly boast of two growing airports, a fine quality of life and a competitive pro-business atmosphere with no personal income tax; it sounds almost exactly like Kurdistan –except on the last one; we can already trump you there. 😊

Like central Florida, Kurdistan has a good workforce ready to go.

And we value education. And just as you have developed a hi-tech corridor here in central Florida, that draws talent and sends results

beyond your region, we see that as a logical opportunity for those looking for a similar foundation in Iraq and the Middle East.

From tourism to manufacturing, to agriculture and transportation, Kurdistan is ready to have others play a bigger role in its economic future. It is indeed the perfect location for a regional base, profitable work in developing infrastructure or launching new businesses outright. As Rich Tesch, onetime president of the Economic Development Commission of Mid-Florida, noted, "As economies have become more global, competition has become more global." This is how anyone can become more global in the Middle East. There are plenty of economic positives in Kurdistan.

Kurdistan can act as a bridge for international trade between the United States and Europe for Iraq and the Middle East. It provides excellent investment opportunities and already some companies (name some if you wish) have found that it is indeed profitable to do business in Kurdistan. We would hope that the ties between Central

Florida and Kurdistan lead to formal cooperative ventures, to foster growth in areas of mutual benefit, including tourism, trade and investment and the advancement of technologies and to enhance educational, research, economic and cultural exchanges between Florida and Kurdistan, with out shared values and mutual interests.

The last few years have seen a remarkable foundation being constructed in Kurdistan that gives all Iraqis the confidence that our nation will become a bright economic light for the entire region.

Now the Kurdistan region is ready and eager to build on that great foundation. And we want to open this investment window to all of you, to have you join us to capitalize on our stability and vision.

Today in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, there are a multitude of paths to investment and prosperity. Opportunity lies in many different sectors of our new economy and I cannot urge you enough to take a good look at what our publication outlines. I am certain you will find

many things that appeal to your enterprise and discover just how easy it will be to find a business home in our homeland.

Kurdistan is the safest place in Iraq and is undergoing an economic boom because of its stability.

The Kurdistan region's political unification, coupled with a dynamic business-friendly government, an investor friendly investment law and tax structure, all make it easier for businesses to invest. Each day we are addressing the challenges of the past as we further democratize our region. Today, we have a more transparent society. We have a new generation of civil servants undergoing the rigors of academies that stress serving the people and the nation, not themselves, as we work to eliminate corruption. We are generating a free press, and working to pass a press law that decriminalizes libel. We are building institutions to ensure that we strictly uphold the rule of law. We are nurturing a society that for centuries has maintained

ethnic and religious tolerance, even under the harshest of circumstances.

Centuries ago, Kurds may have first made their commercial mark as renowned flower cultivators and merchants but today Kurdistan is ready and ripe for major investment projects in fields as diverse as , power supply, water delivery, roads and bridges, educational institutes, general support services, manufacturing and modern gated residential and commercial communities to house the increasing number of middle-class populations.

Atop that list is our agricultural potential, where the right investments and partnerships will turn Kurdistan into the breadbasket for all of Iraq – with enormous export potential.

Additionally, the lure of our natural beauty offers many venues for tourists and tourism, 2008 will be the year for tourism in Kurdistan,

NOT terrorism! The mountains were always our friends – now they can be yours as well.

Some insist on characterizing our economic advancements through the eyes of the past, suggesting that our gains threaten the future of Iraq. This could not be further from reality. Just as our determined-steps- toward- democracy have given hope and assurance to our fellow Iraqis, so too the steps we take to expand and enrich our economy will help prosperity blossom throughout our nation. For example, as we develop our oil and gas sectors, revenue gleaned from the export of our resources will flow into the national treasury before a proportional percentage is returned to Kurdistan. This is what we have proposed under the revenue sharing formula currently under discussion.

Washington DC today stands as your nation's political capital. It is not however the US's economic capital. Baghdad is Iraq's political capital; Kurdistan can be our nation's economic capital.

Our stability can be the engine to stimulate economic growth and prosperity, which if built upon will in turn lead to national stability.

All Iraqis must do what they can to help our country rise from the ashes of war and we are proud of what we can contribute.

It is because of the Kurdistan Region's stability that, in February, a bipartisan group of 15 distinguished members of Congress called upon the U.S. State Department to revise its current travel advisory for Iraq to more accurately reflect the safety and stability of the Kurdistan Region.

We applaud their request and join them in urging our friends at the State Department to update this advisory.

The people of Iraqi Kurdistan are proud of what they have achieved since the genocide of the Anfal campaign, and the betrayals that led to a mass exodus after the first gulf war. Americans should also be proud of where Iraqi Kurdistan stands today – a thriving, developing civil society, in the heart of the Islamic world.

Attracting investment will help us as we build our own private sector. Private sector development stimulates economic growth and aids in the reduction of poverty and the subsequent transformation of societies.

In 2008 we will focus on developing our banking and insurance systems, to increase economic growth. As our Prime Minister has stated, we will facilitate entry into Kurdistan for reputable banks and insurance companies, which in turn will help assure investors that their investments are protected.

One good way to break into the Kurdistan market is through a joint venture with a Kurdistan company (or cite some other good way)....

Some have already seen the benefits of joining in our development.

Today investors have seen the potential for a wide swath of areas, including a regional call center, a tomato paste factory, a Ford Motor Company parts manufacturing facility – just a few examples of harnessing the economic versatility of Kurdistan.

Today's interdependent global economy requires that trade policy be developed at the national *and* state *and* regional levels. Kurdistan should be high on any list you develop as you look to where to become a successful participant in the ever-evolving state of global finance and trade. It is the best place for any business to set up shop to be a player throughout the Middle East... and only getting better. And we are determined. As Pulitzer Prize winning editorialist John C. Bersia, now the special assistant to the president for Global Perspectives and co-chair of the Middle Eastern Studies Advisory

Board at UCF, said “the Kurds are well-known as a stateless people who have struggled against difficult odds.” He added that Kurds have entered the world's consciousness as never before.

Kurdistan has become known as “the Iraq that works,” said Bersia, who played a key role in securing the endowed chair at UCF. He described Kurdistan as developing a model government with increasingly democratic features and an economy based on free-market principles.

We completely concur and look forward to you letting us help you prosper. The potential for greater cooperation with Kurdistan for the benefit of Florida is limited only by the imagination.

Thank you all very, very much.

Qubad Talabani launch speech, February 11, 2008, Chamber of

Commerce building

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman.

I want to welcome all of our friends – old and new – to today's unveiling of our publication, "Invest in the future".

The last few years have seen a remarkable foundation being constructed in Kurdistan that gives all Iraqis the confidence that our nation will become a bright economic light for the entire region.

Now the Kurdistan region is ready and eager to build on that great foundation. And we want to open this investment window to all of you to have you join us to capitalize on our stability and vision.

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We in Kurdistan are excited that we see how sector-al development – in addition to our abundant natural resources like oil -- will spur growth in our region's economy. Already, the two new universities in Kurdistan mentioned in the film have become seven. Likewise, our first international airport has been joined by a second.

Atop that list is our agricultural potential, where the right investments and partnerships will turn Kurdistan into the breadbasket for all of Iraq – with enormous export potential.

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terrorism! The mountains were always **our** friends – now they can be (quick beat) **yours** as well.

Some insist on characterizing our economic advancements through the eyes of the past, suggesting that our gains threaten the future of Iraq. This could not be further from reality. Just as our determined-steps- toward- democracy have given hope and assurance to our fellow Iraqis, so too the steps we take to expand and enrich our economy will help prosperity blossom throughout our nation. For example, as we develop our oil and gas sectors, revenue gleaned from the export of our resources will flow into the national treasury before a proportional percentage is returned to Kurdistan. This is what we have proposed under the revenue sharing formula currently under discussion.

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In 2008 we will focus on developing our banking and insurance systems, to increase economic growth. As our Prime Minister has stated, we will facilitate entry into Kurdistan for reputable banks and insurance companies, which in turn will help assure investors that their investments are protected.

Some have already seen the benefits of joining in our development. For example, allow me to take this opportunity to thank Steve DeAngelis, the president of Enterra Solutions. His efforts to assist emerging Kurdish companies and American entities interested in investing in the Kurdistan region, through a number of business mechanisms -- most importantly, a regional call center -- is applauded by the Kurdistan Regional Government. This point of contract marks a new era for businesses and economic development in the Kurdistan region and provides a viable model for similar centers in other emerging market countries.

Thanks go also to the Department of Defense business transportation agency, led by our friend Paul Brinkley and his task force for assisting Steve and many others throughout Iraq.

Also, I would like to acknowledge Wayne Culbreth. First, for his service in Iraq as a National Guardsman. Second, for his business initiative to develop

and invest in the Kurdistan region. By working on a number of projects, he has been able to understand our determination and share the knowledge with others. For example, at this moment he is very close to bringing the necessary investment to inaugurate a tomato paste factory in Harir, a great example of harnessing the economic versatility of Kurdistan.

I would also like to thank:

The Chamber of Commerce and president Tom Donohue, for hosting the event at this prestigious headquarters and for all the advice and fortitude offered in preparing for this launch.

Newsdesk Media – who produced our wonderful guide that all of you now have. Brendan O’Leary, the editor-in-chief, and Alan Spence, Maysoon Kaibni, Claire Manuel, along with all the contributors – some of whom are in attendance. (Garner, Bohigian, and hopefully Kathryn Porter, Christopher Hitchens.)

My staff at the KRG liaison office here in Washington.

And of course, huge thanks go to the U.S. Commerce Department, for its unflinching, forward thinking on the issue of U.S. business interests and investments in the Kurdistan region and throughout Iraq. They **understand and appreciate** the relative safety and security that makes American investment in Iraq possible. Special thanks to assistant secretary David Bohigian, who you will be hearing from shortly.

In a little over a month, we will be celebrating *Nawroz*, the start of our new year. As in every place around the world, the start of a new year stirs hope and fuels dreams. For Kurds, Turkoman, Assyrians, Arabs and other living in Kurdistan, we can see how many of those dreams will become reality in this New Year that soon will begin. We invite you and our many other friends around the world to join in this celebration of our new year, visit us and share with us as our triumph of determination ushers in a new era of peace, democracy and prosperity.

Thank you all very, very much.

(Introduce next speaker)

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Re "A Major Political Test for Iraq" (editorial, Aug. 4):

Kirkuk was not "largely ignored" by drafters of Iraq's Constitution. Quite the contrary, recognizing Kirkuk's unique position, including the brutal oppression and forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of Kirkuk's citizens by Saddam Hussein's regime, Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution outlines a detailed plan to resolve the status of Kirkuk and other "disputed territories" in Iraq. It expressly mandated a referendum to be held in Kirkuk by December 2007.

Your editorial does not mention the five years of patience shown by Iraq's Kurds to resolve this problem and the Kurdistan Regional Government's continued compromise in agreeing to delay the referendum.

Worse, you actually blame the Kurds for trying to thwart an illegal secret ballot that ran roughshod over the Iraqi Constitution by prejudging Kirkuk's status before the referendum and then declare a sinister intent to "unilaterally annex Kirkuk" and seek "more oil revenue" to further the "goal of [Kurdish] independence."

You also dismiss the hard-fought Iraqi constitutional process by proposing a United Nations mandate for Kirkuk.

The K.R.G., in all respects, has honored the Iraqi constitutional process.

Iraq's Constitution, ratified by almost 11 million Iraqis, is part of the solution, not the problem, to Iraq's difficulties.

Qubad Talabany
Representative to the United States
Kurdistan Regional Government
Washington, Aug. 8, 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/09/opinion/09iraq.html>

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